

CHAPTER 2

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS

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HISTORIOGRAPHY

The so-called ‘barbarian invasions’ have a vital role in, and in many respects stand at the beginning of, European history. Almost all national histories in some way or other go back to a group of invading or migrating barbarians: Anglo-Saxons in England, Goths and Lombards in Italy, Franks and Burgundians in France, Visigoths in Spain, or Scots in Scotland. The popularly perceived founders of the national histories of many western countries are those early medieval writers who are deemed to have offered ‘national’, ‘ethnic’ histories of these migrating peoples: Bede in England, who wrote an *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in the 730s, Paul the Deacon in Italy, who wrote his *History of the Lombards* in the 780s, and Isidore of Seville, whose *History of the Goths, Sueves and Vandals* was written in Spain in the early seventh century. Gregory of Tours, author of *Ten Books of Histories* of his own times (the late sixth century), is classed as having written a *History of the Franks*. Although that was in fact the name given to an anonymous seventh-century six-book abbreviation of Gregory’s work including only the material to do with Franks, it has nevertheless earned him the title of ‘Father of the History of France’.

Most western national consciousness can thus be traced back to notions, however confused, of barbarian invasions or migrations.¹ They are held to have swept away the ancient ‘classical’ world, the world of Rome, and to have introduced the Dark Ages. This was not always seen as a disaster; far from it, German and English historians in particular have been fond of picturing the barbarians as sweeping away a tired, effete and decadent Mediterranean civilisation and replacing it with a more virile, martial, Nordic one. Even writers who modified the extreme versions of this view still often presented the

¹ For what follows, on the historiography of the barbarian migrations, see the various works of Walter Goffart: (1980), ch. 1; (1989); (1995).

Empire as weak and in decline.² French and Italian historians, on the other hand, have tended to see the barbarians as a 'bad thing', destroying a living civilisation, introducing a barbaric Dark Age.³ Whereas those historians refer to the barbarian invasions in pejorative terms (*les invasions barbares*) German and English historians simply refer to 'migrations', wanderings of peoples, *Völkerwanderungen*. In particular, the Germanic barbarians, who include most of the migrating groups, and are still often seen as unified by some kind of proto-German ethos or nationality, migrate along tortuously winding routes, represented in historical atlases as a spaghetti-like confusion of coloured arrows, to their eventual goals, almost as if these were predestined.

Until recently, historians have agreed on two things: whether they saw them in positive or negative terms, it was the barbarians who put paid to the Roman Empire; and these barbarians were largely 'Germanic'.⁴ The fall of the Roman Empire is to be attributed, in however short-term a perspective, to the barbarian invasions (or migrations). This led, in the nineteenth century, to what might be called the 'Germanist' view, which, put bluntly, holds that everything new and different about the fifth, sixth, seventh and later centuries must be attributed to 'Germanic' influence. Consequently, the works of thoroughly Roman writers like Gregory of Tours, Cassiodorus and Venantius Fortunatus were edited in the series of 'Historic Monuments of Germany', *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*.⁵ The Germanist view also led to the description of post-Roman law-codes as Germanic law, and, in archaeology, to the new types of rural settlement which replaced the old Roman villas being called 'Germanic', and to new burial forms, like furnished inhumation (with grave-goods), similarly being ascribed to Germanic influence. Changes in urban life, with the shrinking and even abandonment of Roman towns, and the end of classical urbanism were pinned, in a less positive way, on the Germans and either their savage primitive, destructive tendencies, or, alternatively, their noble adherence to more pristine, rural modes of life. The Germans are seen as flooding, or swamping, the provinces in the migrations of whole tribes or nations.⁶

The 'Germanist' view has been countered with the 'Romanist' or 'continuity' view, which holds that the Germanic barbarians created little that was new. In this picture, the migrations are the movements of small warrior elites (and

² For example, Delbrück (1980), p. 248. This first appeared in German in 1921. For a recent incarnation of the Germanist view, see Drew (1987).

³ For an extreme example from just after the First World War, see Boissonade (1927), pp. 14–31. See also Courcelle (1964), who divides his book into parts called 'L'Invasion', 'L'Occupation' and 'La Libération', leaving no doubts as to which then-recent events of French history were conjured up by the study of the invasions of Germanic barbarians.

⁴ See, for example, Bury (1926), pp. 2–4. For a more recent example, Heather (1995).

⁵ On the *Monumenta*, see Knowles (1962), pp. 63–97.

⁶ Settlement forms: Dixon (1982). Burials: Halsall (1995a).

some extreme versions come close to denying that anyone moved at all), and so are unlikely to have been able to bring about such sweeping changes.⁷ The administration of the former provinces was essentially that of the Roman Empire, run by Roman provincials for their new barbarian masters;⁸ barbarian kingship was largely modelled on imperial Christian Roman ideas;⁹ there was continuity of settlement patterns, even if the forms changed; the towns were simply continuing in a process of change which began as early as the third century; and so on. The Romanist argument has even been deployed in Britain, where there is a strongly held common view that the situation was very different from that on the continent.¹⁰

Although there may be more to be said for the Romanist 'continuity' model than for the Germanist 'catastrophe' view, both models are misleading. There was indeed a great deal of social, economic and political change in the late fourth through to the sixth centuries, but the barbarians cannot be blamed for much of it. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, even controversies over the numbers of the barbarians miss the point of the nature of the changes from Roman provinces to 'barbarian' kingdoms. This chapter will not present a detailed narrative of the barbarian migrations. Instead it offers an overview and interpretation of some of the principal issues which currently engage the attention of historians working on the barbarians and their place in the processes known cumulatively as the 'Fall of Rome'.¹¹ As such it provides a backdrop against which to set this volume's chapters on the individual 'barbarian' successor states. In particular, it will argue that we should reverse the usual ways of seeing the barbarian migrations and the end of the Roman West. Instead of viewing the end of the Western Roman Empire as the result of the barbarian invasions, we should see the barbarians as being drawn into the politics of an empire already falling apart for quite other reasons; the barbarian migrations were the result of the end of the Western Roman Empire. This chapter will also show that, contrary to commonly held views, Britain cannot be viewed separately from the continent, as something of an aberration or special case: the Anglo-Saxons were no more different from the Franks than the Franks were from the Ostrogoths or the Vandals, and maybe less so.

⁷ For recent, extremely minimalist views of post-Roman Britain, see Higham (1992); M. E. Jones (1996). For Italy, more sophisticated, but even more minimalist, is Amory (1997).

⁸ For a study of post-Roman administration emphasising continuity, see Barnwell (1992).

⁹ The Roman inheritance of post-Roman kingship is best seen in McCormick (1986). See also Wormald, chapter 21 below.

¹⁰ Romanist views of Anglo-Saxon England: Barnwell (1997), part IV; Wolfram (1997), ch. 11.

¹¹ For recent works on particular groups of barbarians see, for example, James (1988a); Wolfram (1988); Christie (1994) and Heather (1996). The most recent overview is Wolfram (1997), but see Musset (1975) for a more traditional view. Also Geary (1999); Heather (1999).

WHAT IS A BARBARIAN?

We must, first of all, ask what a barbarian is. The Romans had a reasonably clear answer: in the first instance, it was someone who lived beyond the frontiers of the Empire. There were different kinds of barbarian, based upon the Roman ethnographic tradition and view of geography.¹² To the north, to Roman eyes, were heroic but savage Celts and Germans, living in rural communities and ignorant of urban life; to the south were cunning, slippery Africans or Ethiopians; to the north-east were 'Scythians', nomadic peoples who, as the Romans saw it, lived on horseback; to the east were the Persians, cruel and despotic, but nevertheless with a sort of civilisation (Ammianus Marcellinus, the great fourth-century historian, in fact never refers to the Sasanid Persians as barbarians at all); and finally the Arabs, wild and debauched.

This world-view was bolstered by a sort of geo-biology: in the frozen north, further, as the Romans saw it, from the sun, blood was thicker and was thus drawn down through the body, so Germans were strong and brave, but a bit dim, and with no idea of tactics or strategy; in Africa, closer to the sun, blood was thin and drawn up to the head, so Africans were cowardly but clever and treacherous. Of course, in the middle, the temperate zone, where the Romans were, things were just right, as they were in the socio-political sense too.¹³ All Romans, however, were not the same. Roman ethnography included stereotypical views of the regions of the Empire too, so that the Gauls were rather braver than the Italians, and so on, because they lived further north, and were descended from the Celts.¹⁴ This is a point we must come back to, as it raises the issue of what a Roman really was; ethnographic stereotyping was not simply a case of Romans inside the Empire, versus barbarians outside.

Nevertheless, this world-view, in which they put themselves at the centre, surrounded by barbarians with stereotypical attributes, provided the Romans with a ready-made and very varied source of ideas about barbarians, which could then be deployed in rhetoric. This is important. It is often forgotten that when Roman writers talked about barbarians, they were not engaged in a dialogue with the barbarians. It was not a case of saying '*we* are like this, but *you* are like that', nor was Roman ethnography a simple matter of neutral reportage. The Roman idea of the barbarian was essentially a rhetorical device employed against other Romans.¹⁵ The barbarian, by simple virtue of not being Roman,

¹² Balsdon (1979) gives a useful, basic introductory survey.

¹³ This Roman idea is found in Vitruvius, *De Architectura* vi.1; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 11.80.cxc; Vegetius, *Epitoma de Rei Militari* 1.2. It differs significantly from the Greek view of these matters, originating with Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places*, 12–24.

¹⁴ For example, Ammianus Marcellinus' comments on the Gauls in *Res Gestae* xv.12.

¹⁵ This interpretation is not yet common in late antique studies, but for similar treatments of earlier Roman and Greek attitudes see Hall (1989) and Dench (1995).

could be deployed in any and all contexts, as an 'other', to make whatever point was at hand. A Roman general could be given extra praise for a victory over the barbarians by stressing the wild, savage bravery of the latter, and their huge numbers – despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that it is extremely unlikely that barbarian armies ever outnumbered Roman ones. On the other hand the Romans could be criticised by deploying the barbarian figure. Tacitus' famous *Germania*, a work of the first century, is in fact a lengthy critique of Roman society. Sometimes Tacitus makes his point by extolling a 'noble savage' view of the German, which is, in a way, a lament for what the Romans had (as Tacitus thought) lost on the road to civilisation. Elsewhere, however, Tacitus portrays the Germans and their behaviour as typically barbaric, warning the Romans to mend their ways lest they acquire these traits or lose their superiority over the barbarians. Despite this, some historians and archaeologists continue to suppose that Tacitus' work is a mine of facts about 'Germanic' society. Positive barbarian imagery continued to be used by late Roman writers. Salvian, the priest of Marseilles in the 440s, could savage Roman society for being less just, less fair, more sinful, even than that of the barbarians. How bad can things be, asked Salvian, when people flee to the barbarians because they can be freer under them than under the Romans. The same point was made by Orosius in his *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, and St Augustine could say, in *The City of God*, that the barbarians who sacked Rome in 410 were more merciful, less savage, than the Romans had been to their defeated enemies.¹⁶ Classical ethnography provided a wide array of ammunition in the form of stock phrases. One could discuss the good or bad points of urban versus rural life by reference to the stereotypical non-urban 'free' German; the good/bad points of monarchy by reference to the Persians; the good/bad points of settled agricultural life by reference to the Scythians; sexual morality or family life by reference to the Arabs, and so on and so forth. The barbarian is therefore a floating category, difficult, indeed never intended, to be pinned down. This makes it a mistake to try to find out a particular writer's 'view of the barbarians'. The barbarians could be presented in many 'positive' ways without affecting the fact that, as Romans, these writers still viewed the barbarian with a certain terror as a thing untamed. This point is driven home when one considers, as we will below, the use of the word *barbarus* in post-Roman sources, when the barbarians actually controlled the Western Empire.

So what, then, was 'a Roman'? If the barbarian was only really defined by being something that was not Roman, and if Roman writers like Ammianus Marcellinus could hold equally stereotypical views of the inhabitants of

¹⁶ Salvian, *On the Government of God*, Book v, esp. v.5–11; Orosius, *Seven Books of History against the Pagans* vii.41.7 Augustine, *City of God* 1, 1–5.

particular imperial provinces, then what was it that made Roman-ness? This is equally difficult to pin down, but by the late Roman period it does not seem to have had very much any more to do with the simple fact of being a Roman citizen, let alone to do with living inside the empire's boundaries. It seems that what Roman-ness meant – the historian's term *Romanitas* is not common in our sources, and may only appear in the third century AD¹⁷ – hinged around an idea of *civilitas*, a certain mode of behaviour, and above all ideas of education, of freedom and of living according to the law. In Roman eyes, barbarians had no law, either that which was imposed from above, or that which they imposed upon themselves from within, in other words, self-restraint. Thus they were doubly unfree, slaves to their rulers, slaves to their passions. Barbarians were simply unruly. That Roman-ness was culturally, rather than linguistically, defined meant that Roman could be as fluid a category as barbarian. Thus a barbarian could behave more like the Romans than the Romans, and Romans could be more barbaric than the barbarians. Hence Salvian's complaint that people think it better to live in freedom under the barbarians than in slavery under the Romans. Roman usurpers or rebels were often classified as barbarians; we find that barbarian ancestry is brought out when someone is opposed to the central, legitimate rule of the emperor.¹⁸

The other opposite of rule and law was *latrocinium* (banditry), and banditry shaded imperceptibly into barbarism in Roman ideology. Within the Empire, areas which were governed with difficulty, such as the mountainous areas of the Alps, the Pyrenees, the North African Atlas or Isauria in Asia Minor, were all too easily associated with barbarians. One could therefore be labelled as having cast off Roman-ness, not by leaving the Empire, nor by joining barbarian invaders, but by the perceived rejection of certain norms. Theoretically, the Roman Empire could have become barbarised without the barbarians conquering a square metre of imperial territory. This seems to have been what the sixth-century East Roman historian Zosimus thought had happened.¹⁹ People within the Roman Empire could behave in ways which were seen as barbaric; people from outside the Empire, from the *Barbaricum*, as it came to be called in the fourth century, could behave in ways which exemplified the truly Roman. In sum, you did not have to be a barbarian to be barbarian, although no one could deny that it helped.

¹⁷ *Romanitas*: The earliest usage may be Tertullian, *De Pallio* iv. For statements of the barbarians' inability to live according to the law, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* II.80.cxc; Orosius, *Against the Pagans* VII.43.4–6.

¹⁸ Compare for example the treatment of the half-Vandal Stilicho before his downfall, in Claudian, *De Bello Gothico*, and after his execution in Orosius, *Against the Pagans* VII.37.1 and Rutilius Namatianus, *On His Return* II, lines 41–60.

¹⁹ Zosimus, *New History* II, 7.

These fluid categories of Roman and barbarian bring us to the subject of ethnic identity. It can be seen that Romanity as an ethnic identity was fluid, and not based upon any inherent, objectively measurable factors; it was a state of mind. A general of 'barbarian' origin could be very consciously brought into the Roman fold, and hailed as a Roman, and Romans could be denied their Roman-ness. Within the Empire, in certain circumstances provincial identities, Gallic or Pannonian for example, could transcend the general Roman identity in dealings with 'Romans' from other areas. Ethnicity is multi-layered, flexible, cognitive (a state of mind) and situational (deployed in situations when it is advantageous).²⁰ All these points are crucial to understanding how the provinces, and provincials, of the Western Empire became, for instance, Frankish, Gothic or Anglo-Saxon.

THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE WEST

The Roman Empire suffered a series of set-backs between 235 and 284, political crises, civil and external wars, and socio-economic disorders which are cumulatively known as the 'third-century crisis', although this crisis appeared at different times with different severity in different regions, and in some not at all.²¹ The nature of the 'late' Roman Empire, which emerged from this 'crisis' under the reforming emperors Diocletian and Constantine, is dealt with in the previous chapter of this volume but we need to consider certain aspects of it here, in order to understand fully the nature of the migrations. We shall see that the relationships between local leadership and society and the central government form a complex web in which the Germanic warbands became enmeshed. This is the context for the Germanic barbarians' eventual domination of the West.

The Roman Empire, first, was a big place, extending from Hadrian's Wall to the Sahara, and from the Atlantic to the Euphrates. This huge mass, in crude terms of size, is also hugely diverse, containing desert, pre-desert, mountains, marshlands, forests and so on. Physical geography cuts western Europe into innumerable small regions, whether in mountainous zones, like the Apennines, running down the spine of Italy and cutting the west off from the east, or by high plateaux like the Massif Central in France or the Meseta in Spain, or by major rivers like the Loire or the Rhône, which run across lines of communication as well as forming others. How could a pre-industrial state, with no rapid forms of transport or communication and thus little way of collecting information

²⁰ On ethnicity, the best recent introduction to the debate is by Eriksen (1993).

²¹ Millar (1981), pp. 239–48, gives the best introduction to the 'third-century crisis', but see also Drinkwater (1983), pp. 212–27, and Gerberding, chapter 1 above.

quickly, manage to govern such an enormous and diverse area? How could a huge empire hold together, when the emperor could hardly discover what was happening, and where local communities could deceive him for their own purposes? Gibbon said that the peculiar thing about the Roman Empire was not that it fell but that it lasted so long; as he might be rephrased, it is the early Roman period, not the late, which is unusual and requires explanation. The early Empire held together remarkably well and was run by a minuscule bureaucracy, because, within local communities across the West, competition for local authority was played out by subscribing to Roman culture: by taking part in Roman local government; by competing, within municipalities, in building Roman urban forms; by demonstrating status by building Roman villas; by trying to achieve citizenship. Economically, prestigious goods were made in or near the core of the Empire and travelled out to the provinces; the Empire formed, at least until the mid-second century, a more or less coherent economic system. So the Empire was bound together by the active and eager participation of myriad local communities in its cultural, political and economic life.²²

After the third century this was no longer the case. The Roman world fragmented economically. Whilst the Mediterranean world still clung together as an economic system, manufacture of most of the artefacts of Romanity passed out into the provinces, creating a series of regional economies.²³ After the third-century economic difficulties and a reversion to frequent barter and to taxation and payment in kind, this was exaggerated. After 212 and Caracalla's granting of universal citizenship, even Roman-ness was no longer something to be fought for. The situation wherein local communities actively wanted to be brought into Rome's orbit, because of the local political and social advantages which that brought, had passed. Historians have long noted the expense of being a late Roman *curialis* (town councillor), the subject of much moaning and wringing of hands by contemporaries. Yet it is unlikely that the burdens of curial office were much greater than before. The key difference was that, earlier, people had been willing to pay the price. Now the rewards were no longer worth it. The physical geographical and regional diversity of the West could begin to rear its head again.²⁴

²² On the early Roman Empire and its administration, Millar (1981); Levick (1985); Wells (1992); Lintott (1993).

²³ See Loseby, chapter 22 below.

²⁴ On the late Roman Empire the best and most detailed survey remains A. H. M. Jones (1964), which should be updated with Cameron (1993a); (1993b). For regional surveys illustrating the points just made, see Lepelley (1979); Wightman (1985), pp. 219–311; Potter (1987), pp. 192–209; Esmonde Cleary (1988); Keay (1988), pp. 172–217.

Early Roman urban monuments were put up by local municipalities or local magnates, as competitive gestures of good-will and generosity to their community, and so private money went into public buildings. In the later period, however, such building dried up, and that which was done, and it tended to be maintenance rather than new building, was put up not by local officials but by representatives of the imperial bureaucracy, using public money. Private money went into private building, town-houses and rural villas. As is described elsewhere, the late Roman bureaucracy was enormous – 25,000–35,000 people manning a labyrinth of posts each of which brought a social honorific title and certain privileges, and the posts usually held only for a short time.²⁵ If you waited, your turn would come round. In some parts of the West, the dependence upon imperial office and patronage may have been by far the most important factor in ordering local society, as in northern Gaul and lowland Britain, where there does not seem to be much evidence of huge *latifundia* or aristocratic estates. Elsewhere, in southern Gaul, Italy and Spain, large estates created great wealth and a ruling social stratum less heavily dependent upon participating in imperial government to maintain their position in society. Such people still competed with their equals to order their peer group. This local variety is crucial.

The Empire's difficulties can be summed up by one story. Fourth-century Roman North Africa was a prosperous area of the world, something which often surprises modern students. Here was played out the tale of Count Romanus.²⁶ The story is unlikely to be as simple as it appears in Ammianus Marcellinus' account, but the outlines of the case are as follows. In 363–364 the inhabitants of Lepcis Magna, in Tripolitania, were harassed by raids by the Austoriani, a local tribe, after one of the latter was burnt to death, apparently for brigandage. The citizens called upon Romanus, the Count of Africa, who came with his troops but demanded large sums in provisions, and 4000 camels. These the locals refused, so Romanus left the area and its citizens to the Austoriani. The Tripolitani then sent envoys to the emperor Valentinian I to complain. Romanus, however, had a relative at court and tried to have the affair heard by him. As it was, the emperor heard the envoys' complaint and a defence by Romanus' supporters, believed neither and promised a full inquiry. This, however, was delayed, and meanwhile the North Africans were again the victims of serious attacks, which Romanus allegedly did nothing to avert. Valentinian was unhappy when the news of these attacks reached him, and sent a tribune called Palladius to report on the situation, and pay the African army.

²⁵ See Gerberding, chapter 1 above.

²⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* xxvii.6; with comment in Matthews (1989), pp. 281–2, 383–7.

Romanus then talked his officers into lodging the bulk of their pay with Palladius. When two local townsmen showed Palladius the damage done and the extent of Romanus' negligence, Romanus threatened to report Palladius to Valentinian as corrupt, and as having pocketed the money entrusted to him. To save himself, Palladius made a pact with Romanus, and both reported to Valentinian that the Tripolitanians had no grounds for complaint. The two townsmen who had notified Palladius were sentenced to having their tongues cut out for lying, but fled. Valentinian, wholly deceived in the affair and not lenient at the best of times, also ordered the execution of the previous ambassadors from the province, and the provincial governor, although, again, one of the accused managed to hide, and disappeared. Eventually a number of the guilty parties (in Ammianus' account) were driven to suicide, and some of Romanus' accomplices were executed by Count Theodosius when he led the military expedition in 373 which finally quelled the unrest of the North African tribes. Romanus, it seems, despite a short spell in prison, got away with it.

It has rightly been said that there is much more to this story than the simple apportioning of blame, and that Romanus' side of the story was probably rather different. The saga, nevertheless, does illustrate graphically the difficulty that emperors had in finding out what was going on 'on the ground' in their huge empire, and how this difficulty could be exploited by local individuals. The story of Romanus, rather than being a simple tale of corruption and deception, is actually a clear illustration of how the late Roman Empire held together. All the local competitors for power strove to share in the imperial administration, to obtain imperial legitimation and backing, so that they could exploit it. They also sought access to the emperor and the power he could bestow, to govern their localities. The late Roman period saw a reversal of the earlier system: in competing for local power one no longer asked 'what can I do for the Empire?' but rather 'what can the Empire do for me?' In the late Empire, the hundreds of local, self-governing cells which made up the Empire no longer clung together; instead they were bound together by an enormous imperial bureaucracy overlying local society, a bureaucracy which was essentially a huge patronage system which needed to be managed effectively or the Empire would no longer be able to do anything for the locals. Otherwise all those local cells would spring apart. Put another way, in the early Empire all roads led *to* Rome; in the late Empire all roads led *from* Rome. Fourth-century western emperors managed this situation very well. As is shown in the previous chapter, they positioned themselves on the frontiers of the Empire, on the Rhine at Trier, or along the Danube, where they could supervise their patronage and actively incorporate the provincials – Pannonians under Valentinian, Gauls under Gratian – in the running of the Empire. Hold the Rhine and you hold

Gaul; hold Gaul and you hold the West. They knew that. But the system was precarious.

BARBARIAN SOCIETY AND POLITICS IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

We often gain the impression of greater pressure on the frontiers in the late Roman period. This pressure has traditionally been explained by supposing an increase in barbarian numbers, through population growth. Sometimes, we are given the impression that the Germanic barbarians were driven by a sort of primeval surge towards the Mediterranean.²⁷ Another common explanation sees the pressure in terms of a 'domino theory'. In the third quarter of the fourth century, a people known as the Huns are first referred to by Roman writers, and are often thought to have migrated from the Far East.²⁸ The Huns are thought to have 'pushed' the Goths into the Roman Empire, and to have 'pushed' other Germanic tribes who in turn 'pushed' those in front of them, and so on until the Roman frontier was swamped by fleeing Germanic barbarians.

Instead of these rather dramatic accounts, the impression of increasing pressure on the Roman frontiers is probably best explained by political developments amongst the barbarians themselves. In the third century, as the Roman Empire was undergoing its so-called third-century crisis, changes were under way in *Barbaricum*. In place of, or more probably on top of, the myriad local tribes listed in Tacitus' works, there appeared a series of larger confederacies, which all have classic confederation names: the Alamanni ('All Men') in the south-west of Germany; the Franks ('the Fierce People') along the middle and lower Rhine; the Saxons in the north of Germany; the Picts ('the Painted Men') in the north of Britain; and the Goths ('the Men') in and around the eastern Carpathians and the lower Danube. In North Africa and Arabia other large tribal confederacies appeared. These more powerful confederacies could exert greater pressure upon the Romans.

How had these confederations come into being and how were they ruled? The first question is difficult to answer, but the Romans probably had much to do with it. It has recently been suggested that the Alamanni were a Roman creation, set up to occupy the area between upper Rhine and upper Danube abandoned during the later third-century civil wars.²⁹ It has been argued, even more radically, that these new 'peoples' were largely talked into existence by Roman writers, puffing up Roman imperial work and presence on the frontiers; inventing the 'barbarian threat' in order to justify the imperial activity which,

²⁷ Pirenne (1925), pp. 5–8. Goffart (1980), pp. 11–17, discusses this imagery in some detail.

²⁸ Most famously Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* xxxi.2.i–xii.

²⁹ Nuber (1993).

as intimated earlier, largely held the West together.³⁰ There may be something in this; the barbarians, even the confederacies, could hardly pose a serious military threat to the existence of the Roman Empire, with an army of, it has been estimated, over 400,000 men. It has also recently been argued that these confederacies hardly existed at all, and that there was little change from the early Roman system.³¹ This argument is unconvincing, partly because it leaves us with no option but to explain the fall of the Empire by increased pressure on the frontiers, and it is difficult to see that increased pressure if things were effectively the same as in Tacitus' day. A more convincing treatment of the same evidence shows that the common fragmentation of the confederacies was the result of Roman political hard work beyond the frontier. When the Romans were distracted, usually by civil war, the Franks or the Alamans threw up greater leaders and formed large, effective confederations. Romans had to strive to make sure that this did not usually happen.³²

How did the barbarians rule their kingdoms? If the emperors had problems, even though they had a taxation system, an army of 400,000 and a 35,000-strong bureaucracy, how much worse were the problems for barbarian kings? There were a number of options. A combination of the war-leader king, with short-lived but widespread powers, paired with the sacral king, with longer-lasting but perhaps more circumscribed areas of authority, is often cited. The evidence for the formal existence of these types of kingship is, however, very insecure. Nevertheless, both forms of rulership seem inherently plausible. The sacral, or religious, king, by controlling certain religious aspects of life, bound local communities to his authority in order to participate in ritual, and oversee the necessities of life. The war-leader would protect or help defend communities in times of warfare. Obviously, the latter type of power existed only with difficulty beyond times of crisis and could be removed if things went badly. The fourth-century Burgundians possibly had a combination of these two types of ruler, though again the evidence is questionable. Another basis for overlordship was arbitration. Local communities might be incorporated into a larger polity by appeal to an outside, higher power who could arbitrate, or adjudicate, in local disputes, with both parties accepting the judgement. Thus, the fourth-century leaders of the Gothic confederation on the lower Danube are referred to by the Romans as 'Judges'. Elsewhere, as in the Frankish and Alamannic confederacies we see many petty kings, ruled occasionally, when the Romans lost their grip, by an over-king.³³

³⁰ Drinkwater (1996). ³¹ Elton (1996), pp. 15–44. ³² Heather (1994a).

³³ Germanic kingship, Wallace-Hadrill (1971), ch. 1; James (1989) and Wormald, chapter 21 below. Burgundians: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* xxviii.5.xiv, but for a cautionary note against acceptance of Ammianus' statement at face value, see Wood (1977), p. 27. Goths: Wolfram (1975). Alamans: the *locus classicus* is Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae* xvi.12.xxiii–xxvi.

What kept these kings in power? One thing was wealth: wealth provided by the Romans. Roman artefacts were much prized in *Barbaricum*, as they had been by Celtic kings on the eve of Roman conquest. If leaders could control the acquisition and distribution of such items, through a system of gift exchange, they had a powerful means of maintaining loyalty throughout scattered communities, especially if they could circulate these goods amongst rival local families and play them off against each other. The Romans could pay out large sums to their friends across the frontier, and these gifts could play a big part in the creation of barbarian political power. This can be detected in what historians and archaeologists call 'Free Germany', north of the Roman frontier on the Rhine, and in north Britain. So, as stated earlier, the Romans may indeed have played a major part in the creation of the new confederacies, in the payment of large tributes to barbarian leaders to keep them quiet in periods of Roman civil war, as was frequent in the third and also the fourth centuries, something which helped barbarian paramount kings to appear when the Romans were distracted.³⁴ One could also maintain power via trade. Thus, in the late Roman period, we see the creation of trading stations beyond the frontier, as most dramatically at Lundeberg in Fyn, which was paired with a high-status settlement just inland at Gudme. Another such site is known on the other side of the Jutland peninsula at Dankirke.³⁵

Such barbarian power could be impressive. Just over the frontier we perceive rulers who were able to control manpower and so construct large-scale defensive sites, bringing together skilled craftsmen to produce their own prestige items and symbols of authority, which could be used to support political power. Interestingly, these items were often based on Roman badges of office; the vocabulary of power was the same on both sides of the frontier. Along the upper Rhine frontier, in the Alamannic region we see a number of *Hohensiedlungen* (high settlements; hill-forts), which reveal high-quality craft-specialisation and manufacture. These may be paralleled in north Britain by sites like Traprain Law. Even in low-lying areas we can find similar prestige sites, such as at Gennep, in the Frankish areas just south of the Rhine. Also in the Frankish lands evidence has come to light of fairly large-scale, organised iron-working.³⁶

Around the edges of the Empire larger and potentially powerful kingdoms were being put together. Some depended heavily upon relationships with Rome, but it may be that by the end of the fourth century some rulers just beyond the frontier could maintain quite independent and efficient systems of government. It may be that the Germans further into 'Free Germany' were

³⁴ Heather (1994a).

³⁵ Gudme: Nielsen (1994) and Hedeager, chapter 18 below; Dankirke: Hansen (1989).

³⁶ On *Hohensiedlungen*, see, for example, Steuer (1994); (1997). On Traprain Law, Feachem (1955–56); on Gennep, Heidenga (1994). Iron-working, see Groenewoudt and van Nie (1995).

more dependent upon Roman gifts, paid to help them keep the frontier kings in check. The role of Roman authority in local German society can also be seen in the frequency with which Roman badges of office, like belt-sets, were used in grave-deposits in the large cremation cemeteries of the Saxon homelands, an argument which may very well apply equally to certain brooch-styles.³⁷ In sum, barbarian politics were played for high stakes, stakes very often raised by the Romans themselves. There were strong barbarian kings on the frontier who could increase their authority over their neighbours, but there was also a considerable extent to which barbarian politics depended upon the continued effective functioning of the Roman Empire, just as provincial Roman society did. What would happen if the Empire ceased to function effectively?

THE COLLAPSE OF THE WESTERN EMPIRE

The key date in understanding the barbarian migrations and the collapse of the Western Empire is not 376, when a large number of Gothic refugees, from the political turmoil in their homeland of which the Huns formed a focus, migrated into the Balkan provinces. Nor is it even 378, when those Goths inflicted a disastrous defeat on the eastern Roman army at the battle of Adrianople. It has recently and persuasively been argued that the significance of Adrianople has been greatly overplayed. By the early 380s the Goths had been contained, defeated and settled within the Balkans, in much the same way as innumerable other peoples had been before.³⁸

The decisive date is 388 and the suppression of the 'usurper' emperor Magnus Maximus. After Maximus, no significant western emperor (we may exclude some shadowy and short-lived usurpers) ever went north of Lyons. The defeat of Maximus' western army by the eastern troops of Theodosius I, especially when coupled with the even bloodier slaughter of western regiments, again by Theodosius' men, during the usurpation of Eugenius in 394, was catastrophic for the defence of the region, and it is difficult to see any real imperial activity in northern Gaul or Britain after Maximus' death. Aristocrats fled south; the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the official list of Roman offices, shows that by 418 a number of north Gallic offices had been withdrawn to the south of Gaul; the Gallic capital withdrew from Trier to Arles, probably in 395; a council of Gaul set up in the early fifth century did not represent the north Gallic provinces. The Empire ceased to be able to make itself felt in northern Gaul and Britain, areas where it seems that well-managed imperial patronage was essential for the maintenance of local order, and the results were dramatic.

³⁷ Roman material in cremations in Lower Saxony: Böhme (1974).

³⁸ Burns (1994), pp. 1-91.

Archaeology in these regions reveals the rapid collapse of villa life, of Roman towns and, in Britain, of Roman industries (in Gaul such industries stagnate but do not die out). Cemetery evidence attests to a more insecure command of local authority. North of the Loire, Roman civilisation crashed within the space of two generations.³⁹

This affected the barbarians too. On the last day of 406, Gaul was invaded by a huge army of barbarians, not from the frontier kingdoms, whose kings seem in any case to have been further bolstered by the Romans as they withdrew from the Rhine, but from people further inside *Barbaricum*: Vandals, Sueves, Alans, followed by Burgundians. These were probably the groups wherein political power was more heavily dependent upon gifts from the Romans; the end of such gifts, combined perhaps with the appearance of a new source of political power from the east, the Huns, forced some groups out of power and into the Empire, to seek their fortunes.⁴⁰ Eventually some of these were to found the Suevic kingdom in north-western Spain, perhaps by treaty with the Romans, and the Vandal kingdom of North Africa, probably the only barbarian kingdom to be created more or less entirely by military conquest from the Roman Empire.

Inside the Empire, the civil wars of the 390s had thrown up another dangerous political grouping based around a band of barbarian descent: the Goths of Alaric. This group, dissatisfied after the suppression of Eugenius, and badly treated by the likes of Stilicho, adviser to Honorius the child emperor, sacked Rome in 410. They were eventually settled by the Romans in Aquitaine, where they established their kingdom. The Gothic settlement in Aquitaine has been the subject of much debate.⁴¹ Why settle the Goths so far inside Gaul? The answer is not so complex. After the early fifth century, the effective frontier of Gaul was not the Rhine, but the Loire, so settlements like that of the Goths, like, *a fortiori*, that of the Burgundians in Savoy, and like that of the Alans in Orléans, can be seen as effectively frontier settlements.⁴² Northern Gaul and Britain were left to run themselves.

Here we can return to the differences within provincial Roman society. In Aquitaine, where local society was more easily ordered without Roman patronage, the hand-over to the Goths was managed more or less smoothly, at least before 450. Here the same families stayed in power; and perhaps more

³⁹ On withdrawal to the south: *Notitia Dignitatum* Occ. XII.27. On the Council of the Gauls: Loseby (1997), p. 52. Archaeological evidence of collapse in Britain: Esmonde Cleary (1989), pp. 131–61. On north Gaul: Halsall (1995b), pp. 219–28, 249–51.

⁴⁰ Heather (1995).

⁴¹ Burns (1994), pp. 247–79; Thompson (1956).

⁴² On the nature of the barbarian settlements, see now the judicious summary and interpretation of Wood (1998).

than anywhere else in the west, Roman society and culture continued.⁴³ In the north, the collapse of effective imperial rule brought anarchy. There was no neat transfer of power; and there were no independent, local means of establishing anew an effective social-political hierarchy. Into the political vacuum were sucked new authorities. In Gaul the Franks and the Alamans spread their power, often hand-in-hand with local Roman military leaders to whom they gave their support, down to the Loire and the Alps.⁴⁴

In Britain the chieftains, perhaps kings, of the western highland regions had possibly been given authority rather like that of the frontier German kings (certainly their hill-fort power-bases are uncannily similar to Alamannic *Hohensiedlungen*). The distribution of late fourth-century Roman military equipment covers only the lowland provinces, so it is possible that northern and western Britain had been abandoned by the Roman government in the late fourth century, perhaps under Magnus Maximus. If this was the case then local defence may have been given over to local leaders; Maximus certainly features strongly in the origin legends of the Welsh dynasties. It may well have been these upland rulers whose power, less affected by the Roman withdrawal, was sucked out into the lowlands. It is not unlikely that by the later fifth century Frankish power, too, had spread across the Channel into Kent. This is the context for the dimly remembered, semi-legendary Romano-British rulers called Ambrosius Aurelianus and Vortigern, perhaps even Arthur. It is also the context for the account of the invitation of Saxon allies into eastern England, perhaps north of the Thames estuary, rather than in Kent (although it was the kings of Kent who appropriated the story), and for the expansion of Anglo-Saxon, English authority westwards across the lowlands, in competition with that of the west British kings.⁴⁵

In northern Gaul, where things were remarkably similar to those in lowland Britain, by about 500 the stakes were so high that the competitors for power had been reduced by internal violence and external warfare to two major power-blocks: the Franks in the north and south-west, and the Burgundians in the south-east. The same picture is easily as plausible for England as the currently fashionable model of fragmentation of the area into many tiny kingdoms.⁴⁶ A third alternative, where local social hierarchies were sufficiently established for the locals to continue to govern themselves even where Roman power just evaporated, as in northern Gaul and Britain, may be demonstrated in Spain.

⁴³ Stroheker (1948); Mathisen (1993). ⁴⁴ James (1988a), pp. 67–71; (1988b).

⁴⁵ Distribution of late fourth-century Roman military metalwork in Britain: Böhme (1986), p. 492. Magnus Maximus, as 'Macsen Gwledig', in Welsh genealogies and other semi-legendary traditions: Alcock (1971), pp. 96–8. Post-Roman hill-forts: Rahtz (1982–83); Alcock (1988); (1992). Archaeology and the invitation of Saxon allies: Chadwick-Hawkes (1989).

⁴⁶ The current model is most clearly expressed by Bassett (1989).

There, the evidence suggests that local aristocrats continued to run their local city-districts themselves, independently of either Roman or barbarian rulers, perhaps until the later sixth century.⁴⁷ The processes whereby the western provinces became independent kingdoms were, therefore, not simply the result of large-scale barbarian migrations flooding over the provinces. In some ways we might be better off going back to the term 'invasion', to describe military political take-over by smaller groups of warriors. Sometimes, in some regions, like the Rhineland and eastern England, these warrior-bands were followed by larger numbers of followers, wives and children, but more often the barbarians took power when their leaders became a focus for local provincial society and politics. It is by looking at this that this chapter will end.

LOCAL SOCIETY, ETHNICITY AND THE BARBARIANS

By 500 AD all the Roman provinces of the West had become barbarian kingdoms: the Franks and Burgundians in Gaul, the Ostrogoths in Italy, the Sueves and the Visigoths in Spain, the Vandals in North Africa, the Anglo-Saxons and the Britons in Britain. Ultimately this had stemmed not from huge military attacks and the outright conquest of territory from the Roman Empire, but from a break-down of Roman political structures in the last quarter of the fourth century, which exposed the weakness of Roman rule at the local level.

In areas where everything had hinged upon the presence of the Roman state, there was a dramatic collapse, and people sought new sources of local power. By c.500, although many Roman idioms of power persisted, people now also demonstrated their authority with material culture, which directly referred to non-Roman, barbarian sources, and especially to the Danubian Gotho-Hunnic culture of Attila's short-lived empire. The Frankish king Childeric, who died some time around 480, was buried with Roman symbols like his official brooch and seal-ring, but his grave also contained gold-and-garnet ornament of Danubian inspiration.⁴⁸ The fourth-century Roman Empire had depended for its further existence upon being able to continue to provide the backing for power at the local level. After 388 it lost, and never thereafter regained, its ability to provide this, so people looked elsewhere. Some barbarian warbands were inside the Empire and could provide alternative foci, especially

⁴⁷ Documentary evidence for the military capabilities of Spanish aristocrats: Hydatius, *Chronicle* 81[91], 179[186]; John of Biclaro, *Chronicle* 36, 47; Isidore of Seville, *History of the Kings of the Goths*, 45. For discussion, Collins (1980); (1983), pp. 44–5; Thompson (1976); (1977) and see also Barbero and Loring, chapter 7 below. Archaeologically this seems to be manifest by the continuous occupation of large palatial villas through the fifth and well into the sixth centuries. For a summary, see Keay (1988), pp. 202–17.

⁴⁸ Childeric's grave: James (1988a), pp. 58–64, and Halsall (1995a).

when granted the government of particular provinces; other foci were provided by strong barbarian kings on the frontier who had the power to expand into the northern provinces, and could equally provide support for local authority when no alternatives existed.

We must put the provincials back into the history of the end of the Empire and the creation of the barbarian kingdoms. It will no longer do to see them either as passive and helpless or, as A. H. M. Jones, the great historian of the late Roman Empire, thought,⁴⁹ as indifferent observers of the changes from Roman to barbarian political authority. Nor will it do to see senatorial aristocrats in southern Gaul, Spain or Italy taking office with the barbarians for the simple purpose of gaining protection. Some Spanish aristocrats tried, and admittedly failed, to hold the Pyrenees against the Vandals in the early 400s, but showed that they could raise armed forces.⁵⁰ Southern Gallic aristocrats led military contingents raised from their lands both against the Goths and for them, forming an important component of their armies. In southern Spain, such aristocrats maintained political independence for many decades,⁵¹ so mere protection cannot provide the explanation. In the southern provinces the explanation must be that the new rulers provided what these local aristocrats had had for a long time, and what after 388 they were threatened with losing, that is, access to the centre of political power. The incomers provided the means whereby senatorial aristocrats could maintain their standing *vis-à-vis* their peers, as well as retain their supremacy within their localities. This supremacy was also importantly maintained by the appropriation of ecclesiastical authority, as is well known, but the non-ecclesiastical, military or bureaucratic options were numerically far more significant and have been unduly neglected by historians.⁵² In 507 the Franks defeated the Visigoths at the battle of 'Vouille',⁵³ and within a decade or so had driven them definitively from their Aquitanian kingdom. This led to the southern Gallic aristocrats' removal from the centre of political power, but they soon sought a new one, taking service with northern Frankish kings in order to keep their options open.

In other regions the appeal to barbarian outsiders to maintain power at much more local levels, as in northern Gaul and Britain, was even more necessary. Here, people widely adopted the ethnic identity of the newcomers, as they did, after the political chaos of the mid-sixth century, in the Iberian peninsula.

⁴⁹ Jones (1964), pp. 1058–64.

⁵⁰ Aristocrats holding the Pyrenean passes: Orosius, *Against the Pagans* VII.40.5–10.

⁵¹ See n. 47, above, and Barbero and Loring, chapter 7 below.

⁵² Heather (1994b), pp. 177–97.

⁵³ See Gerberding (1987), p. 41, for the suggestion that the battle of *Campus Vogladensis* took place, not at Vouille, as usually proposed, but at Voulon.

By 700, to all intents and purposes, everyone north of the Loire was a Frank, everyone in the south-east was a Burgundian, everyone in Spain was a Goth; everyone in lowland Britain was some sort of Anglo-Saxon; you had to go to Italy to find Romans. Where had the Romans gone? This was a problem even in 700; to explain the Romans' apparent disappearance, Frankish and Anglo-Saxon writers had to invent stories of mass slaughter and expulsion of native Romans, although the problem was doubly serious in Gaul where they had to explain how the Romans had managed to teach the Franks Latin first.⁵⁴

We saw at the beginning of this chapter that the categories of Roman and barbarian were fluid. In the post-Roman centuries this could be graphically illustrated. In Ostrogothic Italy, the Gothic rulers were almost never referred to as barbarians; barbarians were other foreigners, even other Goths! On the other hand, in the Burgundian kingdom, the label barbarian could be actively appropriated by the Burgundians to describe themselves. In Gaul, the Roman/barbarian dichotomy was turned to describe Catholic Christian as opposed to heretics or pagans. By the eighth century a bored Bavarian scribe could even turn the old attitudes on their head and write (in Latin!) 'Romans are stupid; Bavarians are wise.'⁵⁵

The new political identities of the Goths, Franks, Burgundians, Angles or Saxons could hence be adopted without much disgrace. This was particularly so in that it was the military elites of these people, the armed warriors, who called themselves Goths, Saxons or whatever, in the new kingdoms, and who held the military and political power. As further chapters will show, there was frequently a bipartite division of labour: barbarians fought; Romans paid taxes, so becoming a barbarian could bring with it tax exemption. In the post-Roman legal codes the 'barbarian' element of the population was often given legal privilege, another reason to adopt a barbarian ethnic identity. Even Gregory of Tours, a senatorial south Gallic aristocrat, had a maternal great uncle called Gundulf, a barbarian name perhaps associated with the fact that Gundulf had taken service in the Austrasian Frankish court. Returning to local communities, we can see that the adoption of a new ethnic identity could be important in striving for authority and power against rivals, especially in situations where people were looking for new sources of authority.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ For example Bede, *HE* 1, esp. 1, 34. A marginal comment to a ninth-century manuscript of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* adds to its eighth-century account the fact that the Romans were exterminated after teaching the Franks Latin: James (1988a), p. 237.

⁵⁵ Gothic attitudes to the term 'barbarian': Amory (1997), pp. 50–85. On Burgundian attitudes to the term 'barbarian': Wood (1990); Amory (1993), pp. 1–28. Bavarian marginalia: Musset (1975), p. 190.

⁵⁶ Bipartite divisions: Goffart (1980); (1982); Moorhead (1994), pp. 71–5; Halsall (1995b), pp. 26–32; Amory (1997), pp. 46–85, 91–108. On Gundulf, Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* vi.11.

How did one become a barbarian? Names were one way, as the example of Gundulf shows. We occasionally get references to individuals with two names, one Roman and one barbarian, revealing this process in action. Then there was material culture. In the new, emerging political units of the post-Roman West, dress-style and artefact-forms were important in demonstrating one's political affinity, and this is shown archaeologically in brooch fashions and so on. Other, less archaeologically visible features such as hair-style were also used, as is referred to in a number of sources.⁵⁷ However, the effects were not everywhere the same. In Britain, by 700 the language had changed; elsewhere the linguistic input of the barbarians was far less, even if they nevertheless changed people's ethnic affiliation just as dramatically. Why was this? Is it simply a question of the number of barbarians, as is still usually supposed? Is it insignificant? Linguistic changes can be and have been effected by minuscule numbers of immigrants.⁵⁸ This is a fair point but cannot stand up to close scrutiny, as it suffers, as do many theories of early Anglo-Saxon history, from its insularity. The Franks, Goths and Burgundians had similar, if not greater, political and military dominance without changing the local language, except along the Rhine. Yet arguments that explain the linguistic change in lowland Britain, and the fact that no such change took place on the continent, by reference to large numbers of incoming Anglo-Saxons are also too crude. We have to consider the other side of the coin; the strength of the provincial identity. In those areas where the transition to barbarian power was smoothest, that is southern Gaul and sixth-century Italy and Spain, Roman identity, especially amongst the aristocracy, was important, a source of pride which could be deployed against the parvenus, the barbarians and their hangers on. It is no surprise that no one changed their language here, although, as we have seen, many changed their names. It took the wars and political disruption of the mid-sixth century and the actual destruction of the old Roman aristocracy to change the situation in Spain and Italy. The situation never really changed in Aquitaine before the eighth century; the Aquitanians never became Franks. Instead, from the seventh century many of them increasingly adopted a Basque, or 'Gascon', identity. The reasons for this ethnic change are probably similar to those discussed above, for Britain and northern Gaul. Removal from, and an inability to participate in, core politics in Gaul meant the end of regularly managed patronage. Disappointed rival competitors for local power sought the backing, and adopted the identity, of a more immediate and militarily effective

⁵⁷ Names: Amory (1997), pp. 86–91, 97–102, and *passim*. Archaeology: Halsall (1995a), pp. 56–61. On the processes by which the barbarians were integrated into the former provinces of the Empire and created new social and political groupings and identities, see the contributions to Pohl (1997); Pohl and Reimitz (1998); Pohl, Reimitz and Wood (2001).

⁵⁸ Higham (1992), pp. 189–208; M. E. Jones (1996), p. 39.

power: that of the Basques, who had been attacking southern Gaul since at least the sixth century.⁵⁹

In the north, though, as we have seen, Roman identity counted for much less, and so in northern Gaul change of ethnic identity to the more 'advantageous' Frankish identity was more or less universal by about 600. In lowland Britain, as perhaps along the Rhine, the situation seems to have been even more extreme. It is not unlikely that Latin speech and Roman identity were replaced by both a British political identity, associated with the west British highland rulers, and by the English identity associated with the eastern newcomers. Latin culture rapidly collapsed after 388 and stood no chance. There may very well have been more English migrants than there were Franks in Gaul. On the continent the burial rites of the Germanic barbarians' homelands make little or no appearance in the archaeology of the post-Roman kingdoms, but the cremation rites which the English had employed in northern Germany were adopted in lowland Britain too. It must, nevertheless, be conceded that the adoption of this rite could also be a function of the weakness of local British identity, and it should be noted that many Anglo-Saxons (like their continental counterparts) adopted the common late provincial and post-Roman rite of lavishly furnished inhumation. So we need not invoke huge numbers of barbarian migrants to explain even dramatic culture-change. We must consider the weakness of the indigenous culture as well as the strength of the incoming one.

This chapter has proposed that future work on the barbarians and their role in the changes that took place between the late fourth and seventh centuries should adopt new approaches. We have seen that the barbarian migrations should be understood as the result of the collapse of the Roman Empire, not vice versa; that the formation of the post-Roman kingdoms should be viewed as aspects of provincial history; that the changes of this period, the creation of those kingdoms, and of the new identities, must be understood as the results of active, conscious decisions by many people as part of their struggles and conflicts within their own local societies, because, in this, as in so many other periods of history, we have to put not just the social history back into the political, but the political back into the social, and above all we have to put the people back into their history.

⁵⁹ On the Basques and Aquitaine, see James (1977), pp. 3–27; Rouche (1979); Collins (1984); (1986).

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